

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Claims 1-13 remain pending. Favorable reconsideration is respectfully requested.

The rejection of the claims under 35 U.S.C. §102(a) over JP 2000-12060 (JP '060, translation only) is respectfully traversed. JP '060 is not available as prior art against the present application.

JP '060 is believed to have been published at the earliest as of January 2000. See the Form PTO-892 attached to the Official Action dated February 19, 2004.

The present application is a 371 of International Application No. PCT/JP00/03910, filed on June 15, 2000. The present application also claims priority to Japanese patent application Nos. 11/172405 (JP '405) and 11/304847 (JP '847), filed on June 18, 1999 and October 27, 1999, respectively. Certified English translations of the Japanese priority applications are submitted herewith. The claims of the present application are believed to be supported by the priority applications.

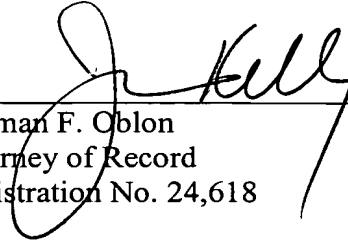
Since the priority applications were filed prior to January 2000, the effective filing date of the present application is prior to January 2000. Accordingly, JP '060 is not available as prior art against the present application. Withdrawal of this ground of rejection is respectfully requested.

Application No. 09/926,779
Reply to Office Action of February 19, 2004

Applicants submit that the present application is in condition for allowance. Early notice to this effect is earnestly solicited.

Respectfully submitted,

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Kelly", is written over a horizontal line.

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